



## HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT

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# ADAMS COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH

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## Immediate Release

### Pregnant Women and infants should not Drink Water High in Nitrates

In 2014, 18% of private wells tested through Adams County Public Health were high in nitrates, exceeding the federal and state standard of 10 parts per million (ppm). Nitrates get in the water supply from agricultural fertilizers, barnyard run-off, and failing septic tanks.

High nitrate levels (over 10ppm) in drinking water pose a risk to infants. Infants who are fed water or formula made with water that is high in nitrates can develop a condition that doctors call methemoglobinemia. This condition is also called "blue baby syndrome" because the skin appears blue-gray or lavender in color. This color change is caused by a lack of oxygen in the blood.

All infants under six months of age are at risk for nitrate poisoning, but some babies may be more sensitive than others. Infants suffering from "blue baby syndrome" need immediate medical care because the condition can lead to coma and death if it is not treated promptly.

Some studies have found evidence suggesting that pregnant women who drink nitrate-contaminated water (over 10ppm) are at a higher risk of having babies with birth defects. Nitrates ingested by the mother may also reduce the amount of oxygen available to the fetus. Nursing mothers should also avoid consuming nitrate-contaminated water.

All pregnant women and infants under six months of age should have their well water tested. A water test kit for testing of nitrates, fluoride, bacteria, and metals, is available free of charge at Adams County Public Health (608-339-4505) to these at-risk individuals.

The Wisconsin Division of Public Health also recommends that people of all ages avoid long-term consumption of water that has a nitrate level greater than 10 parts per million.

This advice is being provided because the safety of long-term consumption of water containing high nitrate levels has not been established and the potential health impacts are poorly understood. Use of this water for bathing, washing dishes, and doing household chores is safe.

It is not recommended to boil water which is high in nitrates, because boiling water actually increases the nitrate level due to evaporation of the water. Nitrate levels may vary, so well water for high risk individuals should be tested annually.

Adams County Public Health can only provide free well water testing for those households with pregnant women and infants. Others can call Adams County UW Extension at (608-339-4237) for information about having their well water tested for nitrates.